

Oklahoma: Home for the holidays?

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In the past few years, my friends and I have been taking more and more “staycations” right here in Oklahoma. We have been going to some of Oklahoma’s amazing state parks and having an absolute blast staying at some of the truly world-class resorts at places like Roman Nose Park, or, recently, with my friends at the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber at Quartz Mountain. I also absolutely love just being out in Oklahoma’s incredible nature. Recently, I received the 2012 annual report from the Nature Conservancy in Oklahoma, and was reminded about just how precious Oklahoma’s nature truly is.

The Nature Conservancy, a national organization, is considered the leading conservation group, working around the globe protecting prime real estate for nature itself. With more than 1 million members across the world, it has had some incredible success protecting more than 119 million acres of land and more than 5,000 miles of river worldwide.

Right here in Oklahoma, the organization has created incredible preserves to help protect some of Oklahoma’s native blessings. For example, close to 39,000 acres on the Tallgrass Prairie Reserve in northern Oklahoma have been used to protect the tallgrass bison there. In the fall of 2011, there was a record-high calf crop, with 755 calves born in this spring, giving an 80-percent success rate with the calving process this year. There, the bison are able to roam and feed on the native tallgrass and avoid dietary supplements or hay.

Also, in 2011, the Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma purchased 490 acres of land along the Blue River in southern Oklahoma. The name of this preserve is Oka’Yanahli, which means “water flowing” in Chickasaw. As Oklahomans, we are already so mindful of the challenges our state faces with water, and this

critical source of water will now have essential preservation work done to help this part of our state be a bustling, beautiful, and riparian area.

Consider this: Since 1999, more than 1,100 acres in Oklahoma have been placed under what is called conservation easements, with the Nature Conservancy. This helps Oklahoma's biological, ecological and agricultural diversity to remain both vast and plentiful.

Thanks to the great work of the Oklahoma Nature Conservatory, my friends and I, you and all Oklahomans, will be able to enjoy our native lands for generations to come. Whether it's hunting, fishing, boating, or just simply taking a hike, we must never lose our most precious and original resources that are filled with rich history and where generations of stories have yet to be told. So if you are staying home for the holidays, please enjoy all that Oklahoma has to offer.

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